

COMMUNITY SERVICES DEPARTMENT

Fiscal Year 2008

The Amherst Community Services Department provides a variety of services to Amherst families and the Amherst community. During FY 05, the Community Services Department's responsibilities increased significantly; during August 2005, the Director of Community Services was appointed staff liaison to the Housing Partnership/Fair Housing Committee, and when the Town was notified it had been designated a Mini-Entitlement community by the state Department of Housing and Community Development, the Director of Community Services also became responsible for managing the Town's Community Development Block Grant program.

The Director of Community Services continues to 1. administer Town appropriations to human service agencies, 2. provide emergency assistance to low-income individuals and families, using interest from the Alfred Field Charitable Trust Fund, 3. assess community needs with respect to childcare and human services, 4. develop new programs that respond to community priorities, 5. work collaboratively with numerous committees and groups that provide important services to the Amherst community, and 6. provide staff assistance to the Community Development Committee (formerly the Human Services Funding Committee).

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

During the summer of FY 08 the Town received notification that its FY 07 grant was approved for \$275,000. The Community Services Department began program implementation during the fall of FY 08 by responding to a series of special conditions and completing an environmental review as required by CDBG and HUD regulations.

Barrier Removal:

The Town received \$23,400 in order to modify the elevator and two bathrooms in the Bangs Community Center, to make them usable by individuals of all abilities.

Mortgage Subsidy Program:

The Town was awarded \$150,000 to provide funding for an additional three low- and moderate-income households to participate in the mortgage buy-down program. These homes will also be permanently deed-restricted and therefore be affordable in perpetuity.

Childcare Tuition Assistance:

The Town received \$55,000 to continue to provide childcare subsidies for low- and moderate-income households with parents working or attending school.

The Community Services Department began implementation of this program during the fall of FY 07 by responding to a series of special conditions and completing an environmental review of each of the above activities.

Chestnut Ct. Kitchen Renovation:

As part of the Town's FY 05 Community Development Block Grant, the Town provided funding for the design phase of a renovation project of kitchens at Chestnut Court Apartments, a disabled and elderly housing development owned by the Amherst Housing Authority. During the fall of FY 07, the Town responded to a request for proposal from the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development for funding to complete this renovation project.

During the fall of FY 08, the Department completed all the paperwork required to begin contracting for services for the renovation of the kitchens at Chestnut Ct. Apartments. The Town, during January of 2008, first signed a contract with the Amherst Housing Authority, which was required to develop bid specifications that complied with Chapter 149, the state's construction law, but also with all federal CDBG and HUD requirements. The Town was also responsible for relocating tenants while their kitchens were being renovated – this involved bidding and contracting with movers and packers, locating appropriate hotel space, contracting for food, cleaning of units after renovation and other miscellaneous services. The general bids were due on March 12, 2008 – the low bidder was Thayer Street Associates. As the project was ready to begin, it turned out that the cabinets that were ordered were not correct and therefore as of June 30, 2008 construction had not begun.

During the fall of FY 08 the Town was notified by DHCD that it will be designated a mini-entitlement community for 2 years after which the Department (DHCD) will reevaluate each community's status. The Town's FY 08 CDBG grant request included the following:

North Amherst School: \$480,143

The Town requested funding for building repair and improvements at the North Amherst School that will include re-pointing bricks, and fixing window trim, the front steps and all handicapped-accessible ramps.

Homeless Outreach: \$85,000

The Town requested funding to provide case management and outreach services for homeless individuals. The Town will contract with the Center for Human Development to provide services as specified in the grant agreement.

Childcare Tuition Assistance: \$75,000

The Town requested \$75,000 to continue to provide childcare subsidies for low-and moderate-income households with parents working or attending school.

HUMAN SERVICES

As part of its charge, the Community Development Committee reviews proposals for funding from human service agencies and makes funding recommendations to the Select Board, Finance Committee and Town Meeting.

Though the Community Development Committee continued to face difficult decisions, the Committee, along with the Select Board, Town Manager, and Finance Committee, all recommended that FY 09 funding be the same as that provided in FY 08. The Committee's priorities for funding continue to follow the guidelines established by the Select Board, namely: 1. emergency services: survival or critical; 2. preventive services; and 3. information and referral. Town Meeting voted the following:

<u>Program Name</u>	<u>FY 09</u>
Amherst Survival Center	\$19,000
Big Brother Big Sister	\$14,000
Family Outreach of Amherst	\$13,000
Not Bread Alone	\$ 6,000
Men's Resource Center	\$ 4,900
Center for New Americans	\$ 4,200
Service Interfaith Cot Program	\$ 4,900

HOUSING

Housing Partnership/Fair Housing Committee

The Housing Partnership/Fair Housing Committee's major responsibility is to increase the availability of affordable housing for low- and moderate-income Amherst individuals and families.

In 1989, the Town acquired a parcel of land, referred to as "Olympia Drive," mainly for open space preservation. Approximately six acres of this parcel were reserved for the development of affordable housing. A joint development plan with the University of Massachusetts had been under discussion; when the University made it known that they did not wish to proceed with a cooperative project, the Housing Partnership and Director of the Community Services Department began planning for the construction of affordable housing. During FY 07, it became apparent that since the University owns the road that provides frontage for the proposed development, the Town lacked the legal frontage necessary to comply with zoning regulations. A comprehensive permit would, however, permit a developer to proceed without regard to this legal requirement. During FY 08, the Housing Partnership/Fair Housing Committee voted to request CPA funding to pay for the expense of applying for a comprehensive permit. It was agreed that the Town would dispose of the property to a developer with a purchase and sale agreement with the purchase of the property contingent on the approval of this permit.

During FY 07 the Housing Partnership/Fair Housing Committee supported a request to the Community Preservation Act Committee for funding to support a mortgage subsidy program that would provide deferred loans to low- and moderate-income households to purchase homes in Amherst. During FY 08 the Housing Partnership learned that CPA regulations required properties to be deed restricted in perpetuity. A Town Meeting vote was required to change language to reflect CPA regulations. The Program now provides down-payment assistance, permanently reducing the cost of the home and therefore guaranteeing long-term affordability.

Committee on Homelessness

The Committee on Homelessness began meeting in FY 08. The Committee's major priorities are two: 1. to provide support for homeless individuals and 2, to increase housing options for homeless individuals. After discussion with the Select Board, Committee members agreed that a feasibility study would first be necessary to identify a series of alternative strategies that will be most effective in increasing housing options. At the very end of the fiscal year, it was determined that the Town's FY 08 CDBG grant will most likely have funds available to pay for this study.

Other Services

Requests for charitable funds continue to increase each year. The increased cost of rent, utilities, etc. makes it more difficult to serve all those in need.

The FY 07 Town Report was completed and copies distributed to the Select Board, the Finance Committee, the Town Manager, department heads, the School Department and the Jones Library. The editors of the Town Report thank members of the Information Technology Department for their help in printing the FY 07 Annual Town Report.

Roy Rosenblatt
Director of Community Services